794 783 The victim offered by the responsible party then has its throat cut, its body is thrown into the water, and the members take some black earth to smear again on the regenerated nya.

If the chief does not observe the chastity imposed upon him before every sacrifice, he must advise the elders of his age grade and purify the altars by sacrificing two roosters or a goat.

It would seem that the taboo of the nimara boli may not be broken without danger, and that in this case the fault is almost irreparable. The Komo is affected not only in one of its parts, but in its entirety, and a general reordering becomes necessary for the society. The chief and the elders carry away the principal altars to their place of origin, that is to say to the village where they were consecrated through contact with those of the local Komo (1). The owner of this latter Komo

1. See p. 190.

keeps the tainted objects for seven days. After this delay, the petitioners return, bringing victims which are sacrificed upon the altars now placed in contact with those from which they originated (2). The

2. The nimara boli is "rubbed" on the nimara boli of the tro ba, the nyõ boli on the nyõ boli of the same, etc.

meat is eaten by the chief who is being consulted, and by him alone. The petitioners must then return home with their sack without speaking a word to anyone during the trip.

This ceremony, which is a second consecration, may under no circumstances be repeated. If the taboo is broken once more after a first fault and a first reordering, the Komo is considered to be entirely destroyed and the village is sometimes abandoned by the inhabitants who have "lost their soul" and who fear the wrath of Faro; they disperse, unhappy and powerless. Some conversions to Islam or to Christianity may have had no other motivation.

H. Role of the Komo

794 182 "The Komo is a society which unites the highest divine power, men, animals, and plants until the /165/ end of the world. It is the

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182 keeper of souls. When there is no longer life on earth, when there are neither men, nor animals, nor plants, the Komo will awaken the souls of the dead which have been in its keeping for eternity."

As a repository of the spiritual forces of its members, the Komo is involved in most of their activities and participates in daily life. Birth, circumcision, marriage, burial, and the cult of the ancestors are all characterized by its direct or indirect intervention. It plays a remarkable role in agricultural life (rain, agrarian rites, household and communal excrement) as well as in the functioning of handicraft technologies. Collective issues (war, political conflict) and economic questions are submitted to its decision. In fact, the members' belongings (grain, cowries) are kept in granaries for which the chief is responsible and from which he agrees to make interest loans to needy members. The chief of the Komo, who is a diviner, is consulted directly by petitioners. Assisted by the elders of his age grade, he is also responsible for dispensing justice (1). Thus the name of an un-

1. The judicial role has been notably pointed out by L. Tauxier in La Religion bambara, p. 300.

worthy member is pronounced above the pembele which is immediately removed. This gesture deprives the culprit of the protection of Pemba and abandons him to misery and shame.

On the other hand, the actual functioning of the society develops social life. The initiates of neighboring villages are invited when the mask is brought out and a number of marriage negotiations are concluded during the drinking parties which follow the ceremonies. These also favor cultural exchanges. It is during publicly held conversations that teaching is furthered, for the rituals are commented upon and explained, and the myths and their metaphysical foundations are presented in detail. The most knowledgeable informants all speak of nights spent in listening to the competent elders around the jars of millet beer.

The Komo is the repository of traditional beliefs and rules of solidarity between members. It diffuses a thorough knowledge of civic and moral instructions, the rights and duties of the members, the taboos and sanctions which affect those who break taboos. Its juridical role makes it a disciplinary agent: it is a powerful support of the Bambara social organization.

D. Role of the Institution

794 182 According to Bambara expression, the ndomo is "the mother of the wanzo of the uncircumcised (1)" for its power which resides in the

1. Wanzo ba ye ɓeble

ritual objects /175/ is composed of the wanzo of all adolescents.

The mask and the altars at first keep a part of the wanzo of the members who wear them, manipulate them, or offer them sacrifices. On the other hand, after circumcision, at the moment of the final leap of the newly circumcised over the ritual fire, the wanzo ultimately leaves them to settle itself in the mask of the ndomo. Thus channeled and conserved, these forces add themselves to those of the uncircumcised in the masks which become the repositories of their life.

[175] Moreover, the soul of the uncircumcised and nonexcised who have died prematurely establishes itself in the altars during the funeral rites celebrated by the members.

The mask of the ndomo is thus the receptacle of the wanzo of the circumcised, living and dead; as for the altars, they contain all the souls of the uncircumcised dead. All of this confers upon the ndomo the responsibility for the life of the adolescents and gives it such power that to a certain extent, this society of young people is feared by the adults (2) who have left it.

794 833 782 2. When an adult, especially a member of the Komo society, has disturbed the peace of a member of the ndomo or has wronged the society, the wanzo may cause him to be impotent. In this case, in order to recover his virility, the man must obtain several tens of gray lizards which are sacrificed in his name on the mask and other altars. The animals are then cooked and the man is completely smeared over with the cooked substance which is then placed in the calabash and poured over the altars; the wanzo assigned to the man by the ndomo thus returns to the latter and the man is rid of its evil.

121 keep its own features only on the native plane on which it was formed and developed.

I have not felt, however, that it was necessary to abandon entirely the French terminology which is familiar to us; it is sufficient to make it fit its new role. Indeed, it would be very difficult to limit oneself to native terms, since it would be awkward and even impossible to find expression in these terms for abstractions which the writer's analysis brings out and of which the native has no knowledge.

A study of custom in its intimate associations thus requires both method and experience if one hopes to arrive at precise facts which have logical interrelationships. The results thus obtained are certainly significant since they show that, perhaps from the very beginning and certainly from a very long time past, the native character follows a path which it has itself chosen and which we can only suspect, rather than observe. This is because the concrete facts which are the landmarks of that history are subject to various interpretations.

177 Today, dislocated by the collapse - thanks to our inter-
182 vention - of the social framework in which he was developing, the native character is working out new spiritual directives based on its own past, making use of contributions of our civilizations whenever they are in accord with the native's own deepest tendencies. The present-day life of the Black man is merely the reflection of this mystique; hence, whatever may be our wishes in the matter and whatever may be the outward appearances, the Black man continues in all fields to be dominated by his past.

121 This fact would in itself justify a study such as the present one - if there were need for justification - for, in the matter of custom particularly, nothing that has happened in the past is unimportant when both the present and the future are closely and inevitably dependent on this past.

Orthez, February 22, 1923

789 The individual is therefore required to [155] undergo proper
783 treatment to return him to his normal, harmless state.

789 From this point of view, social life seems to give rise
788 to a series of rites involving the disintegration and reintegra-
182 tion or the aggregation of the individual in relation to the group in which he lives. Birth, circumcision, marriage, illness, death and the performance of certain trades are all modes of existence, whose beginning and end usually involve three stages: separation from the common milieu, accomplishment of the act, and reintegration into the former milieu or aggregation in a new milieu. Between the first and the second state as well as between the third and the fourth there exists usually a kind of negative interval which we call marginal. This system, which comes to light upon an analysis of multiple facts, is actually subject to modifications or alterations which can change its physiognomy. Nevertheless, the basis of these ritual sequences is so well established that by comparing external manifestations with the theoretical system it is possible to understand them better and to restore to some of them, which have become badly mutilated, their real meaning, which the native is usually, if not always, unable to explain or to define precisely.

A detailed study of institutions will give an opportunity for concrete analysis of these ritual sequences, which a kind of age-old empiricism has transformed into laws of a sort. They have come to represent that part of custom which has acquired a kind of permanence by virtue of public acceptance.

It is apparent everywhere among the Blacks that events of a general character (birth, coming-of-age, marriage, illness and death) are surrounded by ritual practices that vary outwardly from place to place but may all fit our theoretical system of three stages with marginal periods. All denote a common basis of magic and all derive from a long-tried empiricism which has given them a peculiar and relatively stable physiognomy in terms of the milieu with which the rites are connected.

571 What we have just said about individuals must also ap-
182 ply to collective groups: the latter deal with each other or

571 with individuals in the same way as individuals deal with each other. They are not only moral persons, as we put it, 182 but they are truly persons, [156] as evidenced by the Blacks' impulsive need for anthropomorphism.

812 Let us note, finally, that a Black does not abstract himself from surrounding nature; nor has he reached the stage of development at which man regards himself as a kind of intermediary between the natural and the supernatural. The Black is an integral part of nature and that is why he treats it like himself. Therefore, natural phenomena are subjected on his behalf to the same kind of ritual sequences as those followed in his own behavior.

## Chapter 3

## Communities

### 1. General Considerations

114 631 Native society is not simple, and Europeans studying these countries have used terminology which, not being defined, has obscured reality.

In particular, they have used the terms "kingdom" and "empire" to describe Sudanese states, and both authors and readers have taken these expressions to imply a social organization more or less analogous to those meant by these words in our country.

631 These empires or kingdoms, however, are simply clans, i.e., political groups that have imposed their authority on other groups whose members then become their tributaries, members of a caste, or slaves. Such an empire, if one wishes to use this term, has no exact geographical boundaries or, if one prefers, its boundaries are constantly changing. Furthermore, the country embraced by this term has two parts: territories which may be said to be under direct administration, in which the authority of the clan is directly imposed; and those territories whose position with respect to the ruling clan

584 Thus, the fa of the two communities manage the entire transaction. Does this mean that the young people have no way of influencing the decision of the "elders"? No, because here, as elsewhere, all sorts of intrigue affect the decision of the fa. He must take account of the views of those around him; he is aware of their feelings, and he is just as likely to subordinate his interests to affection as to hatred. He is perfectly well aware, as is his entourage, that although he can impose his will, even though arbitrary, while he lives, all he has achieved may collapse at his death if his work was ill supported.

In short, the rigidity of the principles which put the "young" at the mercy of the "elders" is, in fact, more often [182] than not relaxed in favor of the young people's desires. The solidarity between members of the community makes them give heed to the opinions of others; it is this need to minimize differences of opinion that makes any family affair drag on endlessly. Discussions, agreements, and reciprocal gifts characterize the [197] bargaining and compromise which are so great a part of the transactions. From this it is apparent what an essential role is played by the numerous intermediaries who are called in to prevent clashes and to mitigate friction, but too often turn to exploiting community difficulties.

In any event, these discussions serve to publicize these transactions just as we achieve the same end through legal means.

[564] The request and agreements. The request is made by an intermediary. In Kaarta this is a man of caste, usually a dyeli (griot), accompanied by a free man. Elsewhere, notably at Ségou, he is sometimes a middle-aged man, known for his experience in such matters, who in this role is called furu-bolo-ma-tigi, "marriage director."

The furu-bolo-ma-tigi goes to the house of the fa of the girl, states his mission, and if he is favorably received, offers him some kola nuts which he has brought with him. He returns home with a promise that the request will be considered.

The fa does in fact consult his entourage and especially his ancestors and gods. The furu-bolo-ma-tigi returns with offerings to be used in questioning the ancestors and gods; if the reply

794 621 brotherhoods together, although the latter seem to dominate the former. These brotherhoods hem in the communities they dominate by abusively extending their jurisdiction far beyond its proper limits. Indeed, the faithful are not the only ones who are subject to the judgments handed down by the brotherhoods, whose clergy make decisions affecting not only members involved but often also third parties in the neighborhood or even people from neighboring or distant regions. The brotherhoods are tyrannical toward their own members and no less so to strangers, who often see no way of escaping persecution short of asking to be received into the ranks.

794 661 182 Thus, it is apparent how a brotherhood increases in size and in power as time passes. Each year it takes in the young people at the end of the soli, and as a result all the communities are at length absorbed by it live in it and for it (1). It

1. The following is a typical example.

[778] In the village of Marenna (Fouladougou Arbala), the natives belong to the cult of Ba-ku. This boli consists of a small sheaf of roots of the indigo tree. For every newborn child the nyana-tigi makes and consecrates a small Ba-ku, which he places in a gourd and puts in the temple of this nyana. At the time of the soli, the child becomes affiliated with the cult, takes the boli placed in the gourd for him at birth and henceforth wears it on his person. All the families in Marenna are thus closely involved in the cult of Ba-ku, being, as it were, engendered by this god to whom each person owes both physical and spiritual birth. Ba-ku comes from Sangaran, and his high priest is a Dyara; that is why he is invoked and called by the expression Ba-ku Dyara Sangaran-ka. The word ba-ku literally means "tail of a

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goat," and, indeed, that describes the appearance of the little bunch of roots. It is possible that the word Ba-ku is merely the profane name and that the real name of the nyana is kept secret.

claims eminent rights over every person or thing it touches, as a consequence of the supernatural power of the nyana protecting them. [268]

So it is that the brotherhood, by what might be called divine right, comes to play a political role which is inconsistent only because it was not designed to play such a role. Let an ambitious man come forth, one who knows how to make use of the organization and its redoubtable power for his own ends, and the brotherhood then becomes the cradle of a veritable political state.

So it is that when the regular authority cannot firmly resist its encroachments, the brotherhood becomes a kind of high judge and uses that high office to establish a reign of terror which exploits the defections due to hatreds its own machinations have aroused and encouraged. This wretched [578] game naturally brings repercussions within the brotherhood itself: the nyana-den' are at each other's throats, and the grimmest dramas accompany the indulgence of the lowest instincts. The chronicle of Sëgou bears witness to these facts.

It is, unfortunately, by no means unusual for the established authority to condone these crimes through weakness, interest, or membership in the brotherhood. As a result, innumerable regions have fallen into anarchy.

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That is why and how the brotherhoods have been the cause of a great deal of unrest in the native milieu. As a refuge for escaped slaves, malcontents, vagabonds, intriguers, in a word, for all enemies of public order, the brotherhoods everywhere set themselves up in opposition to regularly constituted authority, and when they are unable to take it over, seek to thwart it by taking the head into partnership.

The dynastic convulsions of most of the Sudanese empires, especially that of Ségou, are in large part explained by the usurpations of these great brotherhoods of nyana.

794 The family, too, has been assailed, perverted, [269] and disorganized, because dissident elements found support in the brotherhoods that made it possible for them to combat their "own people" in the communities and sometimes even to bring about their downfall.

Moreover, within the community, they set up the cult of nyana of the boli in opposition to the cult of the manes. In associations of communities, the nyana dugu-da-siri has been gradually abandoned in favor of these imperious and jealous nyana of the boli. Although the latter could not entirely eliminate the former because of their failure to appropriate the rights over the land, they have nevertheless eclipsed it by their all-encompassing authority. So it has come about that nyana of the boli have been created who are honored as protectors of the citizens, although they do not own the soil.

It is remarkable that these destroyers of the natural family always seek to organize themselves as artificial families by taking on certain characteristics of the family: communities of inalienable spiritual and temporal property; communities of the dead and the living; the cult of the manes of the high priests, etc.

It is the secular action of these laboratories of magic that has most strongly shaken the foundations of native society. Only a strong power could contend with them effectively, and such a power has seldom presented itself. Islam has often been their implacable enemy and yet has actually strengthened them by introducing a knowledge of oriental occultism.

### 3. Some Important Brotherhoods

794 The cult is the essential framework of all the brotherhoods. One must know its principal characteristics in order to understand the organization and operation of any brotherhood. Each nyana has its special cult, characterized by particular traits, of course, but these differences do not change the basic elements in which all cults of nyana resemble each other.

Therefore, although descriptions of all the different cults would no doubt bring out an interesting variety of details,

175 of El Hadj Omar, up to April 6, 1890, the day French troups under Lt. Colonel Archinard delivered Ségou from the cruel Moslem occupation.

The Bambara did not long accept the French yoke. To put an end to their plots, the French resident, Captain Underberg, had to execute the king Mari Diara, an act which inspired several local revolts, chiefly in the Sénoufo region. But the new Fama, Bodian, supported by the French, was able to rapidly re-establish peace. Moreover, the destruction of the Toucouleur kingdom of Macina by Colonel Archinard deprived the rebel Bambara of all possibility of outside support. The Ségou kingdom was definitively pacified in 1893.

## CHAPTER 6

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

### I. Traditional Structure of Bambara Society

#### A. Social and Political Organization

182 Traditional Bambara social organization is entirely tied up with religious organization; moreover, the social organization determines the whole economic organization to such an extent that the latter cannot be studied independently.

114 In fact, we still know very little about Bambara social organization. Some good records are available to us in the work of Monteil (1), Aubert and Ortoli (2), Delafosse (3), Labouret (4),

1. Monteil, Les Bambara du Ségou et du Kaarta [The Bambara of Segou and Kaarta].

2. Aubert et Ortoli, Coutumier juridique de l'A.O.F. [French West African Common Law].

797 (Koutiala circle), Mandjakuy (San circle), Ségou, Kolongotomo (Macina subdivision), and at Sikasso (apostolic prefecture). In Guinea there is a Catholic center at Siguiri. In Upper Volta there are centers at Niangoloko (Banfora circle), Ouahigouya, and Bam: Black sisters (Ouahigouya circle). Finally, in the Ivory Coast there is a center at Gorhogo.

Protestant missions are even less numerous; they are generally American. The efforts they have exerted are far from having been crowned with success. We will mention, however, the cultural centers at Bamako with two protestant schools, the center at Sirakoro (Yanfolila circle), the ones at Baramba and Somasso (Koutiala circle), comprising two missions, the center at N'Torosso (San circle), and that of Sikasso. In Upper Volta, centers are at Siniena (Banfora circle) and at Ouahigouya. Finally, in the Ivory Coast there is one at Torogo (Korhogo circle).

## II. Techniques

182 It is impossible to give a complete picture of all Bambara techniques; we are far from knowing them all. Investigations are being carried out on the spot, and already they indicate that no object, in its form or its material, no gesture of the customary actions, is due to the imagination of the maker. On the contrary, the material, [88] as well as the movements, is integrated in a system of representations that the Bambara can explain. The principal techniques among these have been analyzed and explained, but many have been described in a very superficial manner.

### A. Body Techniques

776 The Bambara think that fecundation is the work of Faro. This
833 creative function is represented materially by the eating of a tomato
842 by each spouse before sexual relations, which must be repeated twice. It is by means of this consecrated tomato that Faro transmits the life he conserves in water. The role of the father is to give the new-born his articulations which make him fit for work. He transforms the celestial seed into terrestial seed.